For efficient trust and identity training, Edina chooses retained expertise

By paying for its training by retainer, Edina can access specialist trust and identity skills – to help it meet specific challenges on its roadmap.

Based at the University of Edinburgh, Edina prides itself as a centre for digital expertise – offering services from geospatial data delivery for HE and FE, to a computational notebook allowing students to code in the cloud.

But because it provides multiple large-scale services, Edina’s IT engineers need skills in access management. This is to help ensure that the right users, from inside or outside the university, can access the right portals, seamlessly and securely – using single sign-on and two-factor authentication as appropriate.

So when the organisation decided it needed to bolster its trust and identity skills as part of a large-scale infrastructure upgrade, it turned to Jisc – who are experts in federated access and in the open-source access management software, Shibboleth.

The service: trust and identity retained expertise

Instead of offering Edina a traditional ‘one and done’ training session, Jisc suggested a more flexible approach. So Jisc proposed a “retained expertise” service, providing a specific number of hours of service in a 12-month period.

This approach allows Jisc to develop a specific training service around the needs of Edina’s engineers – with the time usable not just in planning a training session and delivering it, but also in following up afterwards by helping Edina to answer the questions it may have.

As part of the 25 allotted hours each year, Jisc has already provided one session – and it will also be able to provide a second session within the 12-month period.
Benefits: an efficient approach to training

For Keith Copeland, head of technology operations at Edina, the Jisc training has helped engineers to improve skills in an efficient yet flexible way.

“For me it all comes down to efficiency in how we use our resources,” he says. “This training provided specific pockets of information in a really quick amount of time, so the team can get right back to our roadmap. This has allowed us to get what we needed, without taking too many days out of the schedule.”

Jisc did not take a linear approach to the sessions themselves, he says. “They had some prepared slides, but they also coded live on screen – so we were able to ask really good questions and try things that either succeeded or failed, throwing different variables in. It really worked, and I know the next one is going to work well.”

After the course, Keith’s team were able to implement lessons learned, then come back with questions later for the Jisc team.

Technically, Edina will be able to run access management with the level of configurability it needs. For example, it will be able to have test users, and is also able to authenticate external users from outside the University of Edinburgh using sign-on credentials from their home organisation. “We know this is a tried and true method that works across multiple industries,” says Keith.

If Edina didn’t have Jisc for this service, Keith doubts they would get training as specialist as they have received.

“I would probably need to find a specialist consultancy firm who would be able to provide training – but they might only be able to offer something a bit more generic.”

Lessons learned

At the time of writing, Keith has used roughly half of the hours, on one of two training sessions he has planned. Now that he is confident about how long it takes to plan and run a session, he believes he might have asked for training sessions to be held closer to each other, in order to maximise the effectiveness of the service.

“I could plan to have, say, two courses over two months,” he says, to help answer more engineers’ questions and help expedite progress along the Edina roadmap.

Overall, though, he is happy. “I feel that it’s a good service,” he says. “To get two courses out of 25 hours in the year, that’s something I’m perfectly happy with.”

Find out more:

Learn about our retained expertise service here: jisc.ac.uk/consultancy/retained-expertise

Contact our T&I team here: trustandidentity@jisc.ac.uk

Or, contact your relationship manager jisc.ac.uk/contact/your-account-manager

March 2022